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ABSTRACT

The collaborative curriculum development process in a postsecondary language education program in Japan is described, looking specifically at the work of five curriculum development teams, or focus groups: needs assessment; curriculum aims, goals, and objectives; cognitive development and learner strategies; materials development; and learner assessment. The needs assessment team conducted a number of surveys of students and teachers, including two assessments of student objectives and learning style preference and one of faculty perceptions of curriculum needs. The team addressing curriculum aims, goals, and objectives used data from the surveys to establish desired competencies, performance standards, conditions, and assessment tasks. The cognitive development team gathered and collated research and practice in the area of cognitive development and learning strategies. An important contribution of this group was identification of student attitudes and beliefs that might hinder learner independence. Writing teams began to develop the 12 books planned for the course. Activities focusing on learner cognitive development are highlighted here. The learner assessment research team also focused on mechanisms for teaching students self-assessment and individual responsibility for learning. Further research needs are outlined. (MSE)

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ED 367 178

Helping students develop learning strategies; some theoretical and practical considerations.

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Introduction

At a recent international conference of language teachers, Olshtain (1993) talked of the growing trend towards empowerment of both the learner and the teacher in terms of autonomy. Indeed, one of the most significant changes in language education during recent years has been a focus on cognitive development and learning strategies as a curriculum tool. Moreover, the actual process of learning has been increasingly recognised as an essential aspect of pedagogy in addition to learning outcomes.

My aim in this paper is to focus on the cognitive development and learning strategies strand of an curriculum development exercise currently being effected in the language programme of a tertiary institution in Japan. I describe the research studies that have been conducted as part of the project and examine the degree to which cognitive development and the acquisition of learner strategies are included in the curriculum aims, goals and objectives and the teaching, learning and assessment materials being developed. Finally I indicate the ways in which programme evaluation will contribute to the ongoing refinement of the different aspects of the curriculum.

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Background

The increasing inclusion of learner training development in learner-centered language programmes reflects the recommendation in many recent writings that learner autonomy be included as an objective in such programmes (cf. for example, Dickinson and Carver, 1980, Dickinson, 1987; Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Willing, 1988 and 1989; Nunan, 1989; Sinclair and Ellis, 1989, O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, Wenden, 1991.) It is generally agreed, however, that the main goal of all language programmes must be to develop communicative competence in the target language and that the role of language learning strategies must be to contribute to this main goal - that they must be a means to an end rather than an end in themselves.

This study depends on a number of data sets, both quantitative and qualitative. Firstly, two surveys conducted with first and second year students. Secondly a survey conducted with teaching faculty. Thirdly a series of reports and recommendations produced by three of the research teams constituted as part of the collaborative curriculum renewal. Finally, both the materials produced and the assessment instruments developed are examined to see to what degree the strand of cognitive development and learning strategies has been included.

3. The study

In this section I shall describe the subjects and the context of the investigation and then set out and provide some interpretative comments on some of the data.

3.1 The setting

The study focusses on the renewal of the curriculum in Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages (KIFL) a tertiary level vocational institution in Tokyo, Japan. As described elsewhere (Candlin and Nunan, 1992, Harrison, 1992) the management model adopted for the renewal is a collaborative one, involving the establishment of a number of research teams - "focus groups" - each with a clearly defined statement of purpose and set of goals and outcomes. The aim of such a framework was to create a solid foundation for the curriculum innovation by combining the knowledge and experience of the faculty and administration with an increasing awareness of current research in a number of different areas.

The current study examines the outputs and findings of five of these teams - the Needs Analysis group, the Curriculum Aims, Goals and Objectives Group, the Cognitive Development and Learner Strategies group - focussing in each case on the area of learning strategies development. The final groups whose work is studied are the Materials Development and the Learner Assessment groups.

3.2 The research questions

I found it relatively easy to identify the questions which provided the point of departure. What are the preferred ways of learning of the Japanese students attending the institution? Are teachers aware of these

ways of learning? How and to what extent were these findings and the work of other groups (in the area of learning strategies) incorporated in parallel or subsequent groups? Finally, how and to what extent do the classroom materials and assessment instruments incorporate the findings of earlier groups (again in the area of learner training)? Drawing conclusions was not so simple and indeed an analysis of some of the data raised methodological issues and questions about the very nature of the data gathering.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Research team 1 - Needs Analysis.

Willing raises an important note of caution in the introduction to his set of learning strategy activity worksheets:

> "The strategies of learning adopted by any learners will, of course, vary according to each learner's style, ethno-cultural background, education experiences, affective personality factors, and his, or her . . . objectives, goals." (1989, p.3)

It was for this reason that a number of studies were conducted with the learners and teachers involved in the language program in order to try to gain insights into some of these factors.

The first KIFL needs analysis instrument was based largely upon the questionnaire reported on by Widdows and Voller (1991). The development and administration of the KIFL survey, as well as the detailed results are described and discussed in Harrison *et al,* (1992). In brief, the survey was administered, in Japanese, to a stratified sample of 796 subjects, in order to try to identify the students' main learning objectives and their learning style preferences.

KIFL faculty members were surveyed to obtain their perceptions on relevant items asked in the first student survey, in order to determine whether or not there were any differences between teacher and student views that might have to be addressed in the emerging curriculum.

A second survey was conducted with a sample of 254 students some months after the two initial surveys, with the intention of further investigating major trends in, *inter alia,* student preferences concerning styles and modes of learning. The aim was to provide "a more definite portrait of KIFL students' wants and needs" (Kanberg and Progosh, 1993) in order to enable course designers, materials developers and teachers to take account of these in their work.

The following table lists those items concerning learning styles on the surveys and indicates what importance students and teachers attached to them in terms of assisting learning.

Table 1
"I learn best when . ../ In general KIFL students learn best when . . ."

Item	Students			Teachers		
	High	Med	Low	High	Med	Low
the teacher corrects my mistakes immediately/thoroughly	√				√	
the teacher clearly explains the purpose of the lesson to me	√			√		
I translate	√					√
the teacher uses methods that are new and unfamiliar to me		√			√	
the teacher first reviews what has been taught in earlier classes	√?	√?		√		
the teacher regulates everything that is said and done in class (when the teacher controls all aspects of the lesson)	√?		√?			√
I try to guess the meaning of a word or sentence	√			n/a	n/a	n/a
I find out answers by myself rather than hearing the answers from my teacher		√		n/a	n/a	n/a
students help each other by correcting each other's written work			√	n/a	n/a	n/a
I correct my own work			√	n/a	n/a	n/a

The results reveal some interesting information both about Japanese student learning styles and preferences and how teachers view these. For example, the students' strong wish to have their mistakes corrected immediately and thoroughly is important in that if teachers at times neglect accuracy in favour of fluency, then the reasons for this should be made apparent to the learners. There are thus implications for teacher development as well as learner development. Similarly, the fairly low response to the item on new methods, indicates that any introduction of classroom procedures which are very different to those that the students have been used to at high school, may have to be accompanied by careful learner awareness training - and possibly concomitant teacher development. Examples of this might be the introduction of process approach to the development of writing skills, or using role plays in oral work.

Knowing lesson objectives is viewed by both students and teachers as being important and reflects learner centred notions of making students aware of the purposes and strategies for learning. Revision of work done previously is viewed as important by teachers - perhaps as could be expected. However, the conflicting results from the two student surveys makes it unclear exactly what students feel. Survey 1 indicated that students do not rank reviewing previous work particularly highly; survey 2 indicates that they do. This would seem to point to a need for obtaining further data, possibly of a qualitative nature through interviews or discussion groups. There is similar lack of clarity with the item concerning teacher control and regulation. Teachers rank it low, while the first student survey indicates that students also give little importance to

this. The respondents on the second student survey, however, rank it highly. The indication is that the students may wish to have more responsibility for and autonomy in their own learning, but it is impossible to draw firm conclusions from these data sets. Another tentative conclusion to be drawn concerns the student responses to the items focussing upon guessing and finding out answers; attempts to develop learner independence may possibly be accepted by students. Again, further research - of a qualitative nature - is needed in these areas. Finally, the low ranking of the items concerning self and peer correction indicates that these notions, if incorporated into the new curriculum, might have to be done in a structured way, accompanied by learner training.

The students view the use of translation as fairly important while teachers rank it very low. This would seem to point to teacher development sessions focussing on the need to make teachers aware of student expectations and wants.

Further analysis of the data from the first survey in terms of differences between groups, using both a two way chi-square and the Kolmogrov-Smirnov test, revealed differences between first and second year students. Although there is little difference between male and female students, the analysis indicates that the way a student learns at KIFL appears to change with exposure to different methodologies. The issue needs to be further addressed, perhaps by gathering data of a more qualitative nature - interviews with individual or groups of students.

4.2 Research Team 2 - Curriculum Aims, Goals and Objectives

> The curriculum aims that were developed include the following: "to promulgate the idea that language learning is a lifelong process and to equip the learner with the strategies needed to develop as an independent learner in the world beyond KIFL." (KIFL Mission Statement, p. 2.)

The indication from this statement is that the institution is very much committed to a learner centred curriculum and to learner autonomy. The intention at the curriculum planning stage was that information obtained by the needs analysis research team would be used both immediately and retrospectively to develop goals and objectives that would embody this spirit of learner-centredness and learner autonomy and which would pave the way for a learner strategies strand in the course materials. How much, therefore, of the information obtained and reported on in the previous section appears to have been immediately useful in the development of goals and objectives?

The Goals and Objectives team took as their basic conceptual model that which was developed by Scarino *et al,* (1988), which "sees communication goals subsuming or integrating all other course goals" (Mont *et al,* 1993, p.4). In what ways, then, did the group develop the aim described above? The "Learning-how-to-learn" goals are as follows:

Goal 1. To promote positive attitudes towards learning.

Goal 2. To encourage independence and life-long learning.

Goal 3. To develop strategies for self-assessment

So far so good. The curriculum is beginning to take shape, the next step being the specification of exit level objectives. The framework of the

Australian Migrant English Service as described by Mandis and Jones (1992) was adopted by the team which was attracted by the notion of "competencies" - what the learner is able to do at the end of a period of instruction - and by the inclusion of learner strategies as one of the competency categories. As Mont *et al.* describe, each competency in the KIFL curriculum is broken down into performance description, standard of performance, examples of texts/settings and examples of assessment tasks. Performance description "describes the skill or knowledge which the learner is to develop" and "may be expressed in terms of cognitive or linguistic function" (ibid. p.10). For the purposes of this paper, I have confined my analysis to the performance description section of the competencies developed.

Taking the three learning-how-to-learn goals cited above, the corresponding competencies that were developed include:

Goal 1. To promote positive attitudes towards learning.
Competency A.
Can describe positive attitudes that contribute to successful learning
Performance description
describes, discusses and analyses successful learning attitudes; e.g.: motivation, creativity, interests, open-mindedness

Competency B
Can identify the value of learning
Performance description :
describes, discusses and analyses opportunities created through learning

Goal 2. To encourage independence and life-long learning
Competency A
Can apply specific strategies that assist learning/studying
Performance description #1:
compares and evaluates strategies, stating effectiveness
Performance description #2:
describes, discusses and analyses personal strategy preferences

Competency B
Can recognize that learning is a life-long process
Performance description #1:
describes, discusses and analyses stages of personal growth in a lifetime

Performance description #2:
describes and analyses the formal steps involved in obtaining their desired areas of certification; e.g.: goal setting, strategies/procedures required (forms/content/tests)

Goal 3 To develop strategies for self-assessment
Competency A
Can use strategies for self-assessment
Performance description
describes, discusses and analyses strategies used

Competency B
Can monitor and evaluate personal performance
Performance description:
evaluates, discusses and analyses progress and/or errors

From the above, the indications are that the programmes, courses and materials developed, as well as the assessment instruments will include an overt strand of learner training in terms of awareness and strategies for use during both language learning and lifelong learning. However, it is less clear as to how the findings of the Needs Analysis research team were incorporated during the development of the goals and objectives. The indication is that very little direct use was made of the

survey findings but this needs to be researched further through interview or group discussion.

4.3 Research Team 3 - Cognitive Development: Learner Styles and Strategies

This team was charged with " gathering and collating research and practice into the teaching and learning of cognitive development and presenting this information for use by the writing teams in developing syllabus specifications, book plans, unit flowcharts and learning tasks and by the assessment focus group in developing specifications for learners assessment" (Candlin & Nunan, 1992, p.11).

One of the more important contributions of this team was that they drew attention to a number of student attitudes and beliefs that they believed might hinder the introduction of measures designed to increase learner independence. It was felt, for example, that the students' unrealistic expectations, as revealed in the needs analysis surveys - that they will become proficient language users "simply by attending classes" must be addressed; the team anticipated, however, that this problem might become smaller once students were made aware of the goals and objectives statements.

The needs analysis surveys of students revealed the students' obvious concern to have their mistakes corrected immediately and thoroughly (see section 4.1 above). These findings are supported in Kanberg, Maass and Sanders (1992) who indicate that Japanese students "tend to focus on their lack of abilities rather than their accomplishments" and that they "are reticent to produce an utterance or text that may be rife

with errors."(p.2.) The same writers also emphasise how "self-evaluation, self-monitoring and self-reflection are not responsibilities normally given to or assumed by most KIFL students. . ." (p.3.) but which they believe, citing Nunan (1991, pp.173-187) and Willing (1989, pp.77-82) to be essential qualities of an autonomous learner who is aware of different learning styles and learning strategies

Two further qualities of Japanese students are suggested by the team as being potential obstacles to fostering learner independence. First the fact that "to actively participate, to do anything unusual, or to stand out is viewed as showing off, of being 'namaiki' ". Secondly, Japanese students often see themselves as being children who are not responsible for their own learning - they look to the teacher for all direction. (p.3.)

A planned sequence of activities was drawn up subsequent to the production of the team's report in order to address both the potential obstacles and the curriculum goals and objectives statements.

1. Reflecting on their own learning style preferences.
2. Promoting positive attitudes towards learning.
3. Reflecting on reasons for studying English - workplace and social.
4. Thinking of helpful resources for learning English.
5. Understanding effective learning strategies.

(Maass, 1993, p.1)

In addition, it was suggested that the learners should be helped to identify areas for self-assessment, the methods that they might adopt for this, and to set the time that they should allot to the self-assessment task. The next part of this section outlines the possible tasks suggested for the first three items on this sequence.

Maass (1993), suggests that at an early stage in the course the students need to reflect on the way they have been studying English, including their own learning style preferences. They should also become aware of other approaches including those used by their classmates and of the need for positive attitudes towards learning. In addition, it is felt that students should be encouraged to think about reasons for studying English, the main objective being to raise awareness of a realistic and attainable competency level of workplace English and of the English that they might be using as a tourist, for example. The following activities are suggested:

> "1.*Reflecting on their own learning style preferences.*
> Reading or listening to how other learners like to learn.
> Completing and comparing responses on a study-preference questionnaire.
> Survey of other students' or of teachers' learning styles.
>
> 2. *Promoting positive attitudes towards learning.*
> Reading or listening to other learners discussing their attitude towards learning, and identifying positive attitudes.
> Listing positive attitudes needed for foreigners to succeed in learning Japanese, and to compare them with their own for learning English.
>
> 3. Understanding *how English is used in the workplace*
> Reading or listening to KIFL graduates and Japanese teachers describing how they use English in their jobs and in other situations.
> Identifying the language skills needed for different occupations." (p.1.)

It should be noted that the role model of Japanese teachers using English is important in the Japanese context. It is very unusual for English lessons to be conducted by Japanese teachers in anything other

than the medium of Japanese. Making students aware of the fact that their teachers do indeed use English outside the classroom is a small but important realisation step.

4.4 Writing teams

Two of the twelve books in the course have been completed at the time of writing (December 1993.) I have extracted from these the activities that focus on the cognitive development of the learner.

Every unit begins with an activity in which the learners examine the kinds of tasks in which they will be engaging. For example.

"In this unit you will:
- talk about part time jobs
- complete a job application
- think about your reading style
- discuss ways of practising English outside the classroom"

(*Options*, Book 1, Intermediate)

The inclusion of this activity is partly a response to the indication on the student surveys that the students wish to know what activities they will be involved in during the learning process, and partly to the goal of encouraging independence by making the learner more self-directed. This is followed by a 'competency check' "How well can you do the above activities in English? Circle the face that best shows your feelings." This is picked up again after the students have come to the end of the unit -"How well can you do these things now?" The activity has three aims - first to begin to make students aware of the fact that they *can* assess their own progress, second to begin to make them more independent by getting them to think about ways that they can further

improve their progress, and thirdly motivational in that it draws the learner's attention to the fact that he or she has achieved something.

In addition to these activities, the materials which were developed contain sections more overtly entitled "Learning how to learn." One example of this is the focus on learner diaries:

> "**Learning Journal.**
> *What English did you learn this week? Make a list of some of the topics you studied, how much homework you did, how well you understood the activities. Make a learning plan for next week.*
>
> I read about . . .
> I listened to . . .
> Homework I did . . .
> Some things I didn't finish were . . .
> Next week I plan to . . .
> A question I want to ask my teacher is . . ."
> (*Options,* Book 1, Basic.)

A further example is a series of tasks which encourage the learners to examine the different resources available to help them learn English - one of the activities mentioned in the sequence suggested by Maass, 1993.

> 1 "*What are some good ways of learning English outside class? In small groups think of two or three. Write your ideas on the board. How many different ways did your class find?*
>
> 2. *Look at these pictures of different ways of learning English. Listen to the conversation and check what activities you hear.*
>
> 3. *Write three new ways of practising English that you want to try this month.* "
> (*Options,* Book 1, Basic.)

Making students aware of how English is used in the workplace is also addressed in the materials. One example of this getting the students to identify the skills needs for the different occupations that they may enter upon graduation. Again, this is one of the activities suggested by an earlier focus group.

> *Look at these jobs. How much English do you think you need to do them?*
>
> a lot a little none
>
> tour guide
> secretary
> flight attendant
> bank clerk
> etc.
>
> *Now think about the English skills you need to do these jobs.*
> *Write* s= speaking, r=reading, w=writing, l=listening.
> (*Options,* Book 1, Basic.)

Also in accordance with the work of other research teams, the materials contain tasks that encourage the learner to review his or her abilities and progress. There are straightforward self-assessment tasks of the sort "*What projects did you do in this unit? Give yourself a grade*" and more open ended tasks of the type " *What skills do you think you are good at? What skills do you think you need more practice in? What ideas do you have for getting more practice?*" Both types aim to help the learner become more aware of their level and of the work they might do to achieve future improvement.

4.5 Learner Assessment Research Team

This team also advocates the introduction of mechanisms by which students can be introduced to and practise self-assessment techniques. The link with the learning how to learn curriculum goals and objectives is clearly recognised since the report talks of the learner assuming "greater responsibility for the assessment of their proficiency," of their diagnosing "their weak areas" and obtaining "a realistic view of their overall ability."

As outlined in the previous section, the materials contain a number of tasks that are designed to help the learners assess themselves and their work. The Assessment team provide a further bank of learner self-assessment activities that teachers will be able draw upon to share with their students. For example, the learner can be asked to assess him or herself with regard to *participation.*

> "*Grade yourself on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) on each question.*
> Do you ask questions in class?
> Do you complete the tasks given by the teacher in class?
> Do you participate in class discussion?
> Do you cooperate in group work?"
>
> Or "*Homework assignments.*
> Do you spend enough time on your homework?
> Do you prepare well enough for presentations?
> Do you study for quizzes and tests?"
>
> Or *Skills development.*
> "Check √ what you can write now in English.
> - Describe my past.
> - Describe Japan.
> - Write a thank you letter.
> etc.
>
> (Gruba *et al,* 1993, Appendix D)

The team points out the dangers of a commonly held misconception, namely that self-assessment can be used for the purposes of certification. They emphasise that the primary value of self-assessment is in making the learner more responsible, more self-directed and that it is thus fully in harmony with those curriculum goals and objectives which focus on learning how to learn.

5. Discussion

While objective surveys of the type described at the beginning of the previous section serve a certain function in providing information for curriculum developers, there would also seem to be a need to engage the learner more directly in the process at the classroom level by conducting interviews or encouraging discussion groups. Such qualitative surveys could be used independently or as an adjunct to any larger scale survey conducted, in order to clarify specific areas or, equally importantly, to begin to make the learner more aware of his or her own learning. Hardjanto *et al.* (1993) emphasise this role of needs analysis in the materials development process - such surveys, as well as providing data for materials developers can also be an awareness raising exercise - both for learners and teachers.

It is of concern that in the project described in this paper, there is a generation of students who will be leaving the institution before the new curriculum is introduced and who will therefore be largely unaffected by it. Conducting a series of classroom based interviews in order to obtain qualitative data may have given both the students and the teachers

involved a chance to become aware of the issues that were being discussed and therefore to change their learning and teaching behaviours.

The mismatch of the student and teacher views on how students best learn points to a need for teacher development workshops designed to help teachers become more reflective, to make them more aware of learner expectations and Japanese learning styles. A further focus may have to be the role of the teacher as facilitator in the learner centred classroom and how this does not coincide with learner views of the teacher.

In any curriculum innovation an important management tool is that of programme evaluation. In the context of learner styles and strategies, there is a need for ongoing evaluation - surveys, interviews with students and teachers to see if the classroom situation is changing. If the innovation is found to be working and the students are, for example, becoming more self-directed, teachers and course designers can make appropriate changes so that the learner is taken further along the path of independence or provided with a greater range of strategies.

One final thought. Both the materials and the assessment instruments will take the learners so far. Ultimately, however, it is the classroom teacher who will help to ensure the success or otherwise of the introduction of tasks that are designed to empower the student and make him or her more responsible for his or her own learning.

Conclusion

This paper has traced one strand of curriculum innovation from initial information gathering through the specification of goals and objectives to course and materials development. Some of the questions raised by the study which further research needs to address would include the following:

How valuable are large-scale quantitative data gathering surveys in providing information to curriculum designers?

Can smaller scale qualitative data gathering exercises provide more useful information?

What are the roles of both kinds of data gathering in raising awareness in both learners and teachers?

To what extent do learners change their learning styles and develop their repertoire of learning strategies over time?

To what extent do teachers change their classroom behaviour as a result of curriculum innovation and if so, how aware are they of this and to what extent can they identify the factors that have led to the change?

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